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SUBJECT: BSEC MINISTERIAL: VIEW FROM ANKARA

REF: A) STATE 162288

B) ISTANBUL 1910

**¶1.** SUMMARY: Turkey's MFA welcomed the U.S. proposal on an environment initiative with BSEC (Ref A) and supported the concept in principle, as part of a positive message on BSEC potential for bringing broader Black Sea countries together to discuss critical issues. MFA's BSEC point person told us that the meeting of BSEC's Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Moscow on November 1 would be too early to introduce a new initiative. Rather, the initiative should be worked and fleshed out in BSEC's Environment Working Group. End Summary.

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Environment Critical - Work through Working Group  
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**¶2.** MFA DDG Ahmet Asim Arar, the GOT's working level BSEC coordinator, told us that environment was a critical area for Black Sea cooperation. Welcoming the U.S. initiative - and welcoming the U.S. actively using its new observer status, he said that Turkey could be supportive, but would need to evaluate details of the resolution, including financing aspects, and consult within the environment working group. Noting that Turkey was the coordinator of this working group through the end of 2007, Arar stated that it would be useful to have a concrete proposal for the next working group meeting, tentatively targeted for next March. In the meantime, he promised to consult with Serbia on its work program for its Chairmanship, which would start on November 1, followed by Turkey's six months later.

**¶3.** GOT MFA Environment Department Head Namik Erpul was also supportive of the U.S. environment initiative, promising to consult with other countries. He noted the importance of broader Black Sea countries working together to grapple with the challenge of serious pollution in the Black Sea. Erpul stressed the need for coordination with initiatives already underway under auspices of the EU (DABLAS - Danube River) and the Black Sea Commission (charged to implement the Bucharest Convention on Environment), but agreed that BSEC was well placed to be more active in environmental protection.

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Revitalizing BSEC  
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¶4. Noting that BSEC was still a relatively young organization, Arar emphasized the enormous possibilities for action on critical issues.

Turkey is eager to find ways to revitalize BSEC as part of its six-month chairmanship starting in May next year, which would also coincide with the 15th anniversary summit. Arar noted that Greece and Turkey were working together constructively on revitalization, pointing out that the combination of the new Greek Secretary General Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos and his Turkish deputy Murat Sungar had been a positive development. Arar was realistic about the challenges of the disparate group that included some countries with fragile relations. He noted the plethora of agreements and MOU's that were not effectively implemented or enforced. He held out hope for the BSEC reform process, which would include empowering the Committee of Senior Officials. Arar noted the challenge of financing in BSEC, observing that some countries were not paying dues. He hoped that the project development fund could be expanded to be more meaningful.

¶5. COMMENT: Arar was much more positive about BSEC with us than some previous interlocutors at MFA. Turkey holds a special pride of authorship in advancing its BSEC vision, while acknowledging the disparate interests and conflicts embodied in the group. Environmental protection is an obvious target for the U.S. to seek to productively use its new observer status, but it will have to work patiently within the BSEC structure.

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